

# the chronicle

**It's sheer Bliss... as support group helps to bake a difference**

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**The age-defying treat which keeps Jack going strong at 103**

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## Faggots fall foul of US good taste watchdogs

THE Black Country dish of faggots was just too "offal" for Dudley Council's internet security system, which decreed it to be a "profanity".

The bizarre ruling came to light during an email exchange between former Dudley mayor, Councillor Mrs Pat Martin, and retired solicitor John Sanders over letters about food that he wrote to a national newspaper.

The council's Sophos system intercepted a reply from Councillor Martin to 76-year-old Mr Sanders, of Wollaston Court, Stourbridge, and returned it because "it contains the following profanity: faggots".

### Upbraided

The original word was in a message to Councillor Martin from Mr Sanders, explaining that, over the years, he had various letters published about food, including his father's hot cross buns, his mother's faggots and Keith Boxley's pork pies.

When she tried to reply, the message fell foul of the security system and she ended up having to text a message on her mobile phone.

"Pat rang me indignantly to say that she had been upbraided by Sophos, who could not distinguish between my mother's Black Country delicacy, faggots, and Oscar Wilde's chums," Mr Sanders said.

Councillor Martin contacted the council's internet security team, who explained that Sophos was a US system and "faggot" was on its list of profane words.

The team agreed to restore the good name of the Black Country speciality by removing it from the banned list.

## Top brass gather to boost cancer cash

THE Phoenix West Midlands Brass Band is hosting a fundraiser in Cradley Heath to raise cash for cancer research.

The band will be performing at the Salvation Army, Meredith Street, on Saturday, February 26, from 7pm. Organisers are hoping to collect £1,000 for the MJP cancer care trust, which will help assist in the research and production of new treatments.

Tickets are £6 and will be available on the door or by calling Margaret James, on 01384 568822.

## Loaves theme for women's prayer day

A HALESOWEN church is hosting a Women's World Day of Prayer event next week. The service takes place at United Church, on Hagley Road, from 2pm next Friday (March 4).

Services are being run across the country at the same time, with this year's theme, organised by a group of women from Chile, entitled *How Many Loaves Have You?*



Natalie Cutler, aged 21, of Rowley Regis, is off to America for a movie career

## Natalie, 21, jetting off for big break in Hollywood

AN aspiring actress is swapping the Black Country for the bright lights of LA as she follows her dream to make it in Hollywood. Natalie Cutler has already worked for movie studios Warner Brothers and Disney.

The 21-year-old, of Harvest Road in Rowley Regis, graduated from Birmingham Theatre School with a "high distinction" grade.

She was offered a scholarship to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in California, but could not raise the money to go. Now four years on she is determined to make the move stateside – and already has two film roles lined up.

## April's fairytale wish is a magical reality

A PLUCKY youngster in Kingswinford became a princess for a day, courtesy of Russells Hall Hospital's Wishing Well trust.

April Perks, aged nine, who has a rare, central nervous system disease which also affects her eyes, was greeted by a horse-drawn fairytale pumpkin carriage at Dingle Community Primary School, Madeley Road, last Friday.

April's mother, Deana, said: "Her face was an absolute picture, the whole day was fantastic and she still can't believe it happened to her. She asked me if she was

dreaming at one point, it's wonderful to see her so happy and be able to focus on something other than her condition and her medication."

"It was also really nice that she was able to share the day with her best friend, who fully deserved to be a part of the treat."

### Dreams

April has to take steroids every day to control the symptoms and after spending most of her Christmas in and out of Russells Hall she is due to attend Birmingham's Children's hospital later this week to see a specialist.

Steve Ford, who has been a vol-

unteer on the children's ward since 1983, said: "April has always said she would love to ride in a horse and carriage and we thought by making her a princess for the day that it would be the perfect time to allow her to do this."

"It is brilliant to see the children so happy and with the help of the Wishing Well and its supporters it's a great way to give youngsters the chance to make their dreams come true."

April was first diagnosed with neuromyelitis optica (NMO) last November having lost the use of her legs and the sight in her right eye.

# HAVE YOUR SAY CALL ON DAY CARE



Tony Billingham and Carole Jenkins in the day care room at The Regis

A BLACK Country day care centre forced to close under social services cutbacks could be relaunched soon.

The centre, based at The Regis, Old Hill, was axed within a week of a final closure notice at the start of the month after funding from Sandwell Council dried up.

Many of the 30 elderly who used the service were left in tears when the news was broken. Sandwell Social Services, which rented space at The Regis and provided staffing, have moved their day care provision eight miles away to Manifoldia Grange, West Bromwich.

Now, owners of the Art Deco landmark in Reddall Hill Road are calling a public meeting on Thursday, March 3 at 7.15 pm to discuss the possibilities

of resurrecting the day care as a private enterprise to serve people in Dudley and Sandwell.

Directors Carole Jenkins and Tony Billingham, who also run nursing and care homes business Carlton Care Group, believe there is still a strong demand for the facility which offered old people the chance of a day out with entertainment and social interaction.

And they pledged any new operation would be "on a strictly break-even basis."

The business partners, who own seven residential homes in the Black Country, are expecting a good turnout for the meeting. Mr Billingham, of Halesowen, said: "Last year we held an open forum at The Regis on dementia care and we were staggered by the response. There was big turnout and

we were able to offer help and advice to many people."

"What clearly was apparent, is the large number of local people who are struggling with caring for loved-ones at home with little or no respite."

"One of the issues we want to address at the meeting is the possibility of day care for this needy, people group."

### Responsibility

"Also on the agenda is day care possibilities for the elderly who are not dementia sufferers."

As financial cuts from Government begin to filter through, Mr Billingham believes the elderly and frail will be most exposed. "For 25 years we have run the Carlton and have seen huge shifts in care provision, but nothing

that has happened before had the potential to impact on our most vulnerable like the current economic measures do."

"We have a moral responsibility to try to do something and although we cannot afford to provide free day care – staffing ratio implications alone are a big financial consideration – we would like to offer it on a strictly break-even basis."

Mrs Jenkins, of Stourbridge, added: "We have all the facilities here – even a special shower – to meet the needs of day care provision and we envisage it could run Monday to Friday. The meeting will give us an indication of what services the local people need."

"The measure of a society is how it treats its weakest and most vulnerable. It is atrocious that people in

Cradley Heath and the surrounding locality are now having to be transported over to West Bromwich, the nearest day care point where they can be looked after."

"It's just too far for many of the people who came here (The Regis) to travel and given the pick-ups and drop-offs a good proportion of their day out will be spent on a minibus."

At the time of the closure council cabinet member for adult social care Councillor Linda Horton, said Manifoldia Grange would be able to offer a wide range of personalised activities for the pensioners. She added that some efficiencies would be achieved through the loss of rental payments and that there had been "extensive consultations over several months with the users of the day service."

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# Old school ties for two VIPs on Question Time

**“We realised we had two MPs  
among former students ...”**

COALITION MPs Andrew Griffiths and Lorely Burt faced a grilling at their old school in Sedgley in a version of TV's Question Time.

A debate on soaring university tuition fees and cuts to the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) were major topics – prompting the biggest jeers as well as applause.

About 200 students heard the pair and Dudley North Labour MP Ian Austin debate as High Arcal head boy, Joe Dutton, aged 16, chaired the discussion.

All three agreed that Joe handled the event so well he should take over from the BBC's David Dimbleby when he retires from Thursday night's political show.

## Democratic

Mr Griffiths, aged 40, Tory MP for Burton and Uttoxeter, left High Arcal School in 1988 with four A-levels. Mrs Burt, 56, Liberal Democrat MP for Solihull, studied there until 1971, before A-levels at Dudley Technical College.

Ex-pupil Richard Drew, aged 17, of Cotwall End, Sedgley, now a student at Stourbridge's King Edward VI Sixth Form College, spotted the two MPs' links with his old school during work experience at the House of Commons and drew it to High Arcal's attention.

Sukhot Dhami, school community cohesion director, said: "It's our 50th anniversary year and, when we realised we had two MPs among our former students, we thought it would be great to invite them back and to stage our own Question Time."

Pupil Katie Smith asked if scrapping the education maintenance allowance and the increase in tuition fees was another nail in the coffin of the democratic goal of extending access.

Mrs Burt, who abstained in the parliamentary vote on tuition fees, said she would like the government to look again at the issue.

Mr Griffiths said tens of thousands protested about fees, but millions did not.

Mr Austin received applause when he said: "It was a criminal act of vandalism."

## Over-50s' workout

A COMMUNITY exercise class for the over-50s is being launched in Rowley Regis. The class will be held at St Giles Church Hall in Hawes Lane, Rowley, every Thursday from 9.30-10.30am, and admission is £2.50. Call Joyce Walker on 0121 559 8418 for details.



Applause from some of the school audience for a point made from the panel



The three panelists Andrew Griffiths MP, left, Lorely Burt MP and Ian Austin MP at High Arcal School, Sedgley

## Police invite to townsfolk

A SERIES of public meetings and drop-in sessions will be held by police in Amblecote next month.

The neighbourhood team will take the police camper van to Brompton Road Park next Wednesday, March 2, inviting anyone in the area to drop in between 5pm and 7pm for an informal chat with officers and community support officers.

On March 9, a special Police and Communities Together (PACT) meeting will be held in Amblecote Church Hall, Vicarage Road, specifically for local businesses to raise any concerns.

A general PACT meeting for the whole community will be held at Holy Trinity Church, Vicarage Road, on March 30 at 7pm.

Residents who attend any of the meetings will also hear an update on issues raised at previous meetings.

They include anti-social behaviour in the communal car park at the back of Oakhill Drive, and large groups of teenagers gathering in alleyways behind Sainsbury's after dark.

## Problem over new gipsy site removed

WORK on a £1.6 million gipsy site in Tipton is to start within months.

Proposals for the Brierley Lane site stalled last summer as travellers objected.

Plans involved them moving from a 30-year-old site nearby, but they complained about having to move and said the fencing height was inadequate, among a string of complaints. After six months of negotiations problems were ironed out and work is set to start in May.

The existing site in Brierley Lane will be cleared and facilities created on land next to it. The site will include 16 pitches, new amenity buildings and landscaping.

## Decking

The site will be screened from the road by hedges and trees, with individual pitches fenced off, ample parking, paving and decking.

Originally Sandwell Council had proposed constructing plots of different sizes, to form starter pitches and retirement pitches.

However, the residents objected, asking for plots of uniform measurements. The council has now moved boundaries to make all individual sites equal, and has made changes to the lighting.

Councillor Simon Hackett, cabinet member for housing, said: "The money to pay for the work is coming from a Government grant and there will be no impact on the council taxpayer."

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## TV Josie ready for borough big day

ACTRESS Josie Lawrence becomes a freeman of the borough of Sandwell on April 2. The award-winning actress from Old Hill will receive the honour at the same time as long-standing former Tory councillor Bill Archer will be made an honorary alderman.

The ceremony will be held at Sandwell Council House in Freeth Street, Oldbury, starting at 11am.

The 51-year-old actress, who now lives in Hackney in east London, is still regularly seen about Sandwell where her family still live.

Best known for her role in the comedy show *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* she was more recently in *EastEnders* on BBC1.

### Children

Also a recognised stage actress, Josie started her career at the Barlow Theatre, in Spring Walk, Langley, where she is a patron. And she has performed with the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon, where in the 1990s she received the Dame Peggy Ashcroft award for best actress.

Josie is also well-known for her charity work where she has helped to raise hundreds of thousands of pounds for breast cancer research and to provide help for children suffering from autism.

Josie will be the 11th honorary freeman of Sandwell, and the second actress to be given the honour.

In 2004, Smethwick-born Julie Walters was made an honorary freeman.

# Protests fail as market rents put up by council

RENTS for stalls at Dudley market are to rise between 14p and 64p a day, despite 'hopes that charges would be frozen to help traders through tough times.'

Stallholders at the council-run outdoor market in the town centre will see their rents go up between 1.5 and two per cent from April.

The authority says the prices are still among the lowest in the region. Around 60 per cent of stalls are occupied on the six days a week the market operates.

Fruit and veg seller David Flavell, aged 50, says stallholders had hoped for a respite from council-imposed rises. "We had hoped they would not increase the rents this year but despite what they say about looking into ideas from traders about price freezes, they still go up," said Mr Flavell.

All stalls on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays face a 1.5 per cent increase in rent while stalls on a Wednesday and Saturday will have a two per cent increase.

## Community club talk

A NEWLY-launched community club for the over-60s in Halesowen has booked a series of talks to entertain the 30-strong membership.

The Open Door Club, at Hasbury Methodist Church, Albert Road, hosts a talk on home safety and security at 2pm next Tuesday, March 1, followed by an Amble Through Halesowen in Days Gone By, with historian John Billingham, on Tuesday, March 29.

... despite what they say about looking into ideas from traders about price freezes, they still rise

Prices for the most expensive stalls on Wednesdays and Saturdays will range from around £20.25 to £30.62 a day or from around £9.23 to £14 for the cheapest pitches the rest of the week.

### Incentive

Dudley Council's cabinet member for personnel, legal and property, Councillor Adrian Turner, said the authority already offered financial incentives for new and existing traders.

He added that the rises were below the rate of inflation.



Working hard and helping to clear Mousesweet Brook at Cradley Heath are, from left, Lynn Partridge, Neil Lote, Chris Farmer and Will Groves

## Clear-up to lower flooding hazard

VOLUNTEERS have been clearing a brook and creating a nature reserve in Cradley Heath.

Hundreds of tons of silt and waste have already been removed from Mousesweet Brook. Hedgerows have been planted and access to the site has been improved.

The transformation of the brook began with a £175,000 Environment Agency project to reduce flood risk to 130 properties by enabling the water to flow more freely.

Halesowen MP James Morris, Stourbridge MP Margot James and Dudley's Councillor David Vickers were among those working on the site.

The nature reserve is being created at a site owned by St John's church near St Anne's Road, Cradley Heath.

Environment Agency area flood risk manager John Buckingham said: "We are transforming Mousesweet Brook to help reduce the risk of flooding."

## Service to sell old fire engines

A PROPOSAL to sell off old fire appliances by West Midlands Fire Service on the open market has been given the go-ahead.

In the past, the fire and rescue authority donated the appliances to poor countries. Since 2002, four fire engines have been given to Pakistan, one to Romania and one to Cameroon.

But at a meeting of the authority last week, it was decided to sell them for up to £10,000 each in order to claw back some of the cash lost from Government cuts.

### Response

Chairman David Hinton said: "We are ceasing to become a benevolent society."

"Unfortunately, in these tight financial times, things have got to change. We are seeking to maximise the value of these appliances on the market."

The authority's budget for this year was also confirmed at the meeting. It set aside £112 million for 2011-12 compared with £120m last year.

This is in response to a reduction of the Government grant that makes up about 70 per cent of the annual budget. The grant has been slashed by £10.164m, or 12.5 per cent, over two years from 2011 to 2013.

It is feared this could rise to a total cut of 37-40 per cent up to 2014.

Councillor Hinton has said this could equate to 800 job cuts.

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### Borough's Gove plea is renewed

EDUCATION Secretary Michael Gove is being urged to keep his promise to visit Sandwell in the wake of the council's High Court win. In an open letter, council leader Councillor Darren Cooper has asked Mr Gove to come to the area.

He urges him to talk to pupils, heads and parents at nine schools where £138 million of Building Schools for the Future funding was cut. But Sandwell's Tory opposition leader, Councillor Ray Nock, said the council should now

focus on raising attainment within schools rather than focusing on "bricks and mortar".

Councillor Cooper, who has already called for the resignation of Mr Gove, said the purpose of the letter to the minister was "to plead with you to keep a promise you made last year".

It says: "You said then that you would visit Sandwell to talk to the pupils, heads and teachers in the schools which you had decided would not now be re-built."

## Boss's Turkish delight over £6m trading deal

### Hall has a wedding engagement

BRIDES and grooms-to-be are invited to an historic Dudley hall's open day next week.

Couples looking to tie the knot are invited to Priory Hall on Saturday, March 5. They will be able to look around the venue and its surroundings in Priory Park, which features the old Priory ruins and is overlooked by Dudley Castle.

Information on cars, wedding cakes, balloons, photographers, bridal wear and flowers will all be available from exhibitors at the event.

Models will also re-create wedding ceremonies at the venue and fashion shows will be held.

Wedding registrars will also be on hand at the event, which runs from 10am to 4pm.



Preparing for the wedding exhibition at Priory Hall, Priory Park, Dudley, next week is superintendent registrar Penny Fulford

AN INTERNATIONAL metal trader based in Stourbridge has been celebrating scooping £6 million of new business after signing contracts with companies in Turkey.

Black Country Metals managing director and chairman Peter Mathews has brokered the deal after a series of meetings with business chiefs in the Mediterranean country.

The 64-year-old is now urging other Black Country firms to go global, and said that companies would benefit from the move, especially during the tough economic times.

More than 350 workers are employed worldwide by Black Country Metals Ltd, based in Lye, and its associated companies.

"Doing business in Turkey has proved very successful and it could prove very fruitful for the Black Country. It is important for businesses in the region to find new markets at the current time and we should be looking to global markets to show just what the Black Country has to offer," Mr Mathews said.

### Investment

The deal will not directly lead to new jobs in the region at this stage, but Mr Mathews said positions could become available in the long term if more business comes from the deals.

Mr Mathews said that he secured the new business on a trip last month as part of the UK Trade & Investment's West Midlands Environmental Technologies Cluster mission to Ankara, the Turkish capital, and Istanbul.

"Business needs to fly the flag for the region. We need to look further outside this market to countries abroad for business."

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## Red tape thwarts clean-up of graffiti

VILLAGE volunteers have been banned from cleaning graffiti from vandalised canal bridges in South Staffordshire because of health and safety red tape.

Members of Wombourne's Best Kept Village committee have been ordered to take specialist training before they are allowed to scrub off spray paint.

The bridges near Ounsdale Road and Giggetty Lane have been targeted by vandals, but the volunteers still hope to better last year's second place finish in the Staffordshire competition.

British Waterways, which owns the structures, has not agreed to fund its own clean-up, and fears that chemicals will leak into the water if volunteers do it.

### Chemicals

Councillor Jackie Granger added: "We've come to a grinding halt, but we'd like to have it done by the time judges visit in May."

"British Waterways can't do it because of the cost, so we're discussing the possibility of them training us to do it. It is frustrating."

Stephen Hardy, of British Waterways, said: "We welcome the interest. However, removing graffiti from canal bridges is a task that requires specialist attention. It carries a risk of damaging the historic brickwork or causing pollution and harm to wildlife. Our volunteering team are making efforts to meet the group at Wombourne to discuss the activities they can get involved with."

# Link to old priory with naming of new roads

NEW street names for a £37 million housing development on the site of Dudley's former North Priory estate will be inspired by an historic landmark.

Work on the £1m first phase of the 314-home project started last year after a £5.5m grant from the Homes and Community Agency.

There are 100 homes in the first stage. Developer Bromford is building 63 affordable homes, 56 of them for rent and seven for first-time buyers on lower incomes.

Another developer, Keepmoat Homes, will build 37 properties which will be put up for sale.

Dudley Council revealed that it has come up with seven street names for the new development which all have associations with the Priory of St James's, which was founded in the area in the 12th century.

Street names include Bradfield Way, after the Church of Bradfield which was

bestowed to the priory, Webley Grove, after John Webley who was the Prior of Dudley between 1535 and 1539, and Shrewsbury Place, after the Prior in 1539-40, Thomas Shrewsbury.

Hackett Drive is named in honour of the Chapel of Coton Hackett given to the priory.

### Occupied

The ruined Dudley Priory, which has Grade 1 listed status, lies in what is now Priory Park.

Council chiefs say the new housing development is progressing well. The Keepmoat sales centre is set to open in the next few weeks and two show homes will be ready in the spring.

Six properties will be ready for sale in late spring while the first rented properties will be available by summer. All properties in the first phase will be completed by summer 2012.

More than 270 homes which once occupied the site were demolished in 2009 to make way for the new scheme.

Developers moved on to the North Priory site in August last year.

Dudley Council's cabinet member for transportation, Councillor Angus Adams was being asked to formally approve the allocation of the new road names this week.

## Group is baking a difference



Joshua Nicholls, aged eight, gets baking with members of the Dudley Bliss Group

CUPCAKES have been decorated by a Black Country family group to raise cash for special care babies.

It is part of Cake A Difference, a national annual fund-raising scheme organised by Bliss, the special care baby charity.

The Dudley Bliss Group decorated the cakes at their regular get-together.

The group provides support and activities for Dudley families who have had an ill or premature baby on a neo-natal unit.

Organiser Joanne Weston said: "Making cupcakes is so much fun. It's even better

that such simple cakes can help to raise money for special care babies." The group is holding a raffle, with prizes including a special occasion cake, and organisers hope to raise £500 for the charity.

Cake sales are being organised across the borough at venues such as Alder Coppice Primary School, in Sedgley.

The group usually meets on the second Saturday of every month at Stourbridge Children and Families Centre. For details, email dudleybliss@live.co.uk or telephone 07815 454457.

## Jobs at risk as tie-up is axed

DROP-IN facilities for young people in Dudley and Stourbridge will continue in a different form after the council decided against renewing a £1.3 million contract with a private firm.

Kent-based Prospects Services runs Connexions centres in Stourbridge and Dudley, and the 35 jobs are at risk.

The centres offer advice on careers, education, health, money and relationships. Council bosses say the firm declined a request to cut costs.

Around 35 staff work at the centres in Wolverhampton Street, Dudley, and High Street, Stourbridge.

### Learning

Dudley Council has said it will consider taking on around 13 staff from the centres to deal with children who have special learning needs.

Councillor Liz Walker, cabinet member for children's services, said: "The council very much values the work of the Connexions Service as a crucial area of support for young people and has no intention of stopping information, advice and guidance."

"We are committed to ensure the Connexions Service continues and will continue to provide a range of support services to young people."

Prospects Services declined to comment.

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### thechronicle

## Fans flock to author Jacqueline

BEST-SELLING children's author Dame Jacqueline Wilson met hundreds of her devoted fans when she spent a day at a Black Country school.

Jacqueline has been a regular visitor to the Dudley area since she launched Dudley Children's Book Group in 1998.

### Latest

She was welcomed back to the Earls High School, Halesowen, to talk about her life, her work and her latest book, *Lily Alone*.

It is currently top

seller in the children's books lists.

Jacqueline spent an afternoon last week in a question and answer session with 60 pupils from Halesowen's Hasbury Church of England School and Ham Dingle Primary, Pedmore, Stourbridge.

In the evening 290 guests, including teachers, parents, librarians and school governors, also questioned Jacqueline.

She always wanted to write, and produced her first "novel" at the age of nine, filling numerous exercise books. She was a journalist in her teens.



Jacqueline Wilson with, from left, Hasbury CofE Primary School pupils Chloe Whitehouse and Suzanne Dear and Ham Dingle Primary School pupils Beth Morgan, Harrison Martin-Lawes, and Amber Loyndes

## One in million illness kills leader of Scouts

### Julian's second wind as sax star

HALESOWEN saxophone star Julian Smith - who was voted just behind Susan Boyle in the 2009 Britain's Got Talent final - is achieving his dream with a major nationwide tour.

The 41-year-old father of two has jumped off the Simon Cowell bandwagon to land on his feet thanks to a deal with Big Bear Music, in Birmingham.

He toured the UK for 19 dates, supporting 1970s soul band The Stylistics, and this month began his own round of 30 concerts, starting at the Landmark Theatre, Ilfracombe, north Devon.

Julian started playing the clarinet when he was about 14 and later took up the bassoon.

He is at the Robin 2 in Bilston, Wolverhampton, on March 26, and has a show lined up at Lichfield Garrick on March 5.

Julian's other shows in the region include the Artix Theatre, Bromsgrove, on April 3.

### MP's call on local tourism

A BLACK Country MP has called for a Parliamentary debate to promote tourism in the region.

James Morris, Conservative MP for Halesowen and Rowley Regis, highlighted the popularity of Dudley Zoological Gardens and Halesowen Abbey in a House of Commons question.

He said: "Tourism is actually the UK's fifth biggest industry.

"In and around Halesowen and Rowley Regis we need to promote our tourist attractions, such as Dudley Zoo and Halesowen Abbey in order to drive economic growth and create jobs.

"The coalition is developing a tourism strategy and it is important that the Black Country plays a role."



Halesowen saxophone player Julian Smith, now on tour

A GRIEVING widow has spoken about her husband's death from a sudden and devastating brain illness that strikes "one in a million".

Scout leader and father-of-three Stuart Hanslow, aged 53, was being treated for stress and depression as he became forgetful.

But he was diagnosed with "sporadic" Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), a version caused by random changes in the brain, three hours before he died.

Tests following his death, at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, on January 28, have eliminated the variant of CJD caused by eating infected meat.

IT consultant Mr Hanslow's widow Jo, 52, said at the family home in Habberley Road, Kidderminster: "He was going downhill quite quickly and by Christmas his speech had gone.

### Diagnosos

"If he tried to say a sentence, it was like a record being played backwards."

Stourbridge-bred Mr Hanslow was admitted to Russells Hall Hospital, Dudley, but transferred to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital on January 27.

Mr Hanslow was given the CJD diagnosis just three hours before he died. "They are 99 per cent sure it was sporadic CJD, which affects one person in a million," said Mrs Hanslow, a sales assistant at Marks & Spencer in Kidderminster.

Mr Hanslow was troop leader of the 8th Kidderminster St John's Scout Group and his children are Samantha, aged 23, Daniel, 20, and Drew, 15.

## Hundreds of townsfolk added to dole queue as region suffers

BRITAIN'S unemployment rose by 44,000 in the three months to December to 2.49 million, with the biggest increase in the West Midlands.

The region saw 28,000 more people join the jobless queue and a 261,000 adults now out of work.

At 9.8 per cent, the West Midlands has one of the highest local unemployment rates in the UK, where the average is 7.9 per cent.

The number of people claiming Job-seeker's Allowance increased by 2,400 last month to 1.46 million, the Office for National Statistics said last week.

The figures vary because not everyone classed as unemployed can claim the allowance. In Dudley, the claimant figure rose 588 to 9,767, or 5.1 per cent of the working population, and in Kidderminster and Wyre Forest it jumped 215 to 2,354 or 3.8 per cent. There was also a jump in Walsall of 376 to 10,148 or 6.4 per cent.

### Negotiate

Sandwell saw an increase of 459 to 12,876, or seven per cent of the working population, while Wolverhampton saw an increase, of 472, to 11,292 or 7.4 per cent.

The figures were released a day after new figures revealed inflation rose to four per cent in January.

The ONS said average earnings were

rising slower than inflation, with figures revealing they increased by just 1.8 per cent in the year to December. This is down from 2.1 per cent the month before.

Workers were typically paid £456 a week in total in December.

Experts warned that the worsening figures serve to show the fragility of the labour market, with workers lucky to be in a job rather than being in a position to negotiate higher wages.

The youth unemployment rate swelled to 20.5 per cent, up 1.5 per cent on the quarter and the highest figure since comparable records began in 1992.

The number of young people out of work is at 965,000, the highest figure since modern records began.

## Nelly setting hot pace for race training

TWO runners have been joined on gruelling training sessions around Dudley by their trusty pet dog Nelly as they prepare for the London Marathon. Cheryl and David Jasper, who have been inspired by their daughter's battle with hearing problems, are raising cash for the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, which has supported Molly, now aged 13.

She was born with only 50 per cent hearing and has to wear two hearing aids.

The couple, of Lawnswood Road, Wordsley, have been training on canal towpaths.

"A lot of people recognise

us now because they always see us out running with the dog," Mrs Jasper said.

"She managed 15 miles the other day and didn't even seem tired."

Molly's parents are aiming to raise £1,750 – a target which was set when they signed up.

Mrs Jasper, a teaching assistant at Belle Vue Primary School in Wordsley, said: "Molly is a real inspiration to us. She is always happy and never lets it get to her."

To sponsor Mr and Mrs Jasper for the London Marathon on April 17, log on to <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/Jaspers4rnid>.



Cheryl and David Jasper, seen with their daughter Molly and the family dog, Nelly, in regular training ready to run the London Marathon

## Pubs face action over TV football

DOZENS of pubs across Dudley have been issued warnings or face court action over alleged illegal screenings of Premier League football.

Prosecution officers from the Premier League's monitoring firm, the Media Protection Services, have been carrying out checks in pubs in recent months.

Officials are clamping down on pubs screening satellite broadcasts from European Union coun-

tries such as Albania and Greece.

Dudley borough was described as a "hotbed" for the sale of illegal viewing cards which allow foreign TV channels to be broadcast through British satellite boxes. Media Protection Services spokesman Ray Hoskins branded the cards a "con" that would land licensees in trouble.

The council is awaiting the outcome of European Court of Justice proceedings involving Portsmouth landlady Karen

Murphy. She is contesting a ruling that she was showing matches illegally using a card from a Greek satellite broadcaster, and won the crucial backing of Europe's Advocate-General on February 3.

"We will find out the judgment in around three to four months but in the meantime pubs will still be showing matches illegally if they continue using cards for foreign broadcasts," Mr Hoskins said.

## Advances up by 77pc

TIPTON and Coseley Building Society lent £45 million in mortgages last year as its profits doubled to £2.47m.

The Tipton said gross mortgage advances were up 77 per cent on the previous year, while savers doubled to £5.9 million.

With its four branches in Tipton, Coseley, Sedgley and Bilston, the 110-year-old society employs 67 people and has 40,000 members.

Chief executive Chris Martin said: "2010 was a year when we 'got back to business' after the credit crunch."

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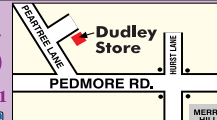
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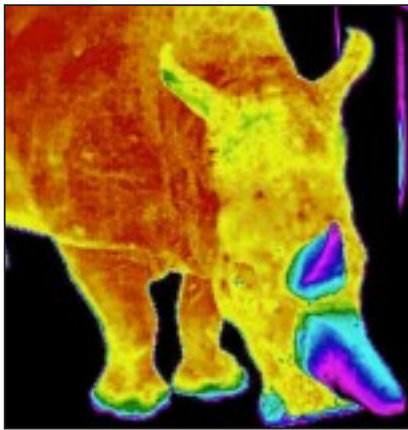
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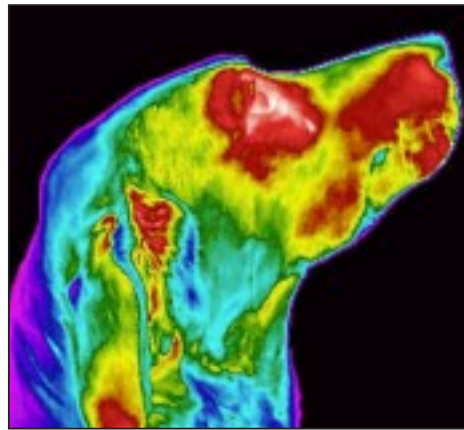
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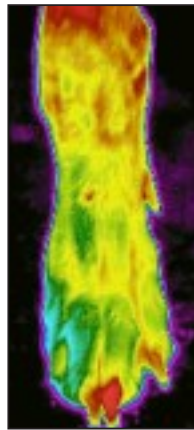




Even a rhino can get the point of thermal imaging



Man's best friend, in colour



Heat focused in a claw

# Heat is on as Helen finds the diagnosis

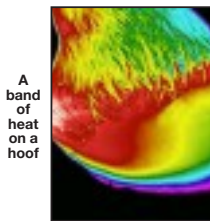
A KIDDERMINSTER woman is turning up the heat with a new veterinary diagnostic tool.

Helen Morrell hopes to see the Veterinary Thermal Imaging service rolled out across the country.

It is claimed to be the UK's first such all-species device and can be used on all sorts of creatures, from cats, dogs and horses through livestock and on to zoo or marine life.

The VTI provides a visual management tool for diagnosing, monitoring and treating injury, illness and disease.

Using a specially designed



A band of heat on a hoof

camera it detects heat emitted from the animal, turning it into electrical pulses.

These pulses are assigned a colour, depending on the temper-

ature readings – the various colours will flag up problem areas.

Use of the device quickly pinpoints where an animal is in pain, limiting distress.

Veterinary Thermal Imaging (VTI) works under a code of conduct prescribed by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and is an extension to diagnostic tools such as x-rays, MRI scans and Ultrasound.

## Course

Mrs Morrell, founder of VTI and a veterinary physiotherapist, was the first person from the UK to be accepted onto the thermal imaging course at the

## Veterinary tool that shows pain hotspots

University of Florida's vet school last year.

"VTI is a great opportunity for UK animal professionals and owners to use a service that is non-invasive, emits no radiation, can be repeated as often as required and can eliminate the

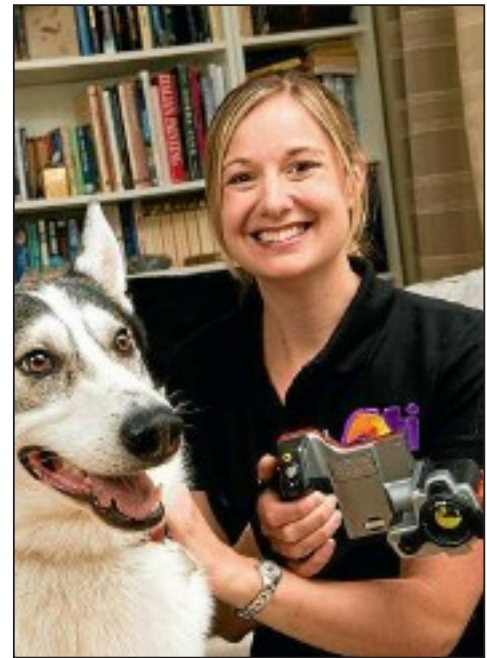
need for other expensive investigations," said 35-year-old Mrs Morrell.

"VTI is an effective, low cost, mobile solution that reveals where an animal's problems lie, fast and without causing pain or distress.

## Traditional

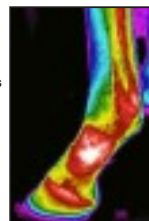
"We don't replace traditional veterinary services but rather enhance them," added Mrs Morrell, who used to live in Kidderminster and Bliss Gate but is now in Oxfordshire with her husband and two-year-old son.

"Whilst most diagnostic tests focus on specific anatomical areas, and require a degree of



Helen Morrell with dog Darcy. Picture: Professional Images

Hotspots on the leg of an animal



tion," said Mrs Morrell, who is looking at franchising the service.

"This being the case, you can apply the stitch in time philosophy, hopefully saving money, stress and your animal's discomfort."

It's claimed that a full VTI appraisal can be cheaper than an x-ray. It also pinpoints issues for treatment or further tests, determines the extent of an injury, allows an owner to monitor treatment progress and can even pinpoint the reason for behaviour problems, many of them being seated in pain. More details on website - [www.veterinary-thermal-imaging.com](http://www.veterinary-thermal-imaging.com)

## Advertisement

### Doreen's story

I have so much to thank Mr Burchell for... his advice and wonderful treatment.

I had a history of problems with my own teeth and received a lot of treatment in hospital. The implants I were advised to consider have been wonderful, but I found it a difficult decision to make. I hadn't heard of the procedure for dentures, but how glad I am that I took Mr Burchell's advice.

To say I am pleased with my new teeth is an understatement.

They are absolutely perfect and a pleasure to wear. I love to show them off. The difference the implants make to the security of the denture is simply unbelievable, it really is life-changing for me.

I found Mr Burchell's expertise second to none and he went to so much trouble to make each visit to the clinic a pleasure.

In the past I would have to consider what food to eat and there was always a problem with food particles becoming trapped under the bottom denture. I no longer have any problem at all and do not have to consider what food I should have or how to eat it.

Life has changed dramatically. The



dentures are so stable I no longer have to cut an apple to eat it. Another great benefit is that I don't have to continually wash my dentures.

I can understand how people would feel nervous about having implants. I am 81 and certainly don't feel too old to invest in such a life-changing experience.

### Peter's story

I can eat anything, but that's not always been the case. It's as if I have my natural teeth back and I cannot believe the difference.

Having read good reports of Mr Burchell's reputation at fabricating realistic, natural-looking, well-fitting dentures, I made an appointment to see him.

On my first consultation I explained the difficulty I was having in stopping my lower dentures from moving around and not being retained in a comfortable position.

He suggested I visited implant dentist Jonathan Pugh to determine if I would be suitable for the procedure. I agreed, but not without reservation due to procedure involved. My consultation with Mr Pugh was professional and reassuring and the X-rays he took showed I had sufficient bone to support two implants which could secure my lower denture.

The insertion of the implants was painless – no different to having a filling.

Mr Burchell fitted my perfectly-crafted dentures, securing them to the implants.

They were a superb fit, a situation I



had not experienced for a number of years. While initial costs may appear high, having considered the long-term benefits of the treatment, I felt confident I was making the right decision.

The stability of the denture is just great and I can happily go to any restaurant without thinking about what suitable choice might be on the menu.



### Terry's story

I'm a confident guy, you know, nothing really keeps me down – even when things are not good. But I had nine years of trouble with my teeth and eventually it began to erode my confidence.

I would never have believed it: I'd have a laugh about it, but it really isn't funny when you have unresolved problems with false teeth.

My dentist eventually referred me to Mr Burchell to see if there was some way of making my plates fit properly. The difference now is a world apart. My plates fit perfectly, look like my real teeth and I can live life impulsively once again. Before, if I was going to a restaurant, I would have to use a fixative to secure my teeth. That was okay if I could eat within a couple of hours of using

the fixative. Anytime after that, it was hopeless, but now I can tackle anything. Previously, I had never been in contact with an actual denture-maker, teeth had always been prescribed through a dentist and the difference for me was incredible. There were five stages on the route to my final prescription and the treatment I received at every point was excellent. My teeth were well worth the money – what price can you put on being able to eat normally and socialise without embarrassment?

My confidence is back and Mr Burchell did everything he said he would: That my teeth would fit, I would be able to chew properly and they'd look real, totally natural. To sum up, there's nothing I have attempted to eat, which I have not been able to.

# TRANSFORMATIONS

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false teeth which can look and feel like your own. Many people complain they never meet the person who makes their dentures, but now you can as we craft your teeth from start to finish in our practice.

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For many satisfied patients, our natural-looking teeth and attention to detail has become their natural choice – take a look at their stories.

# College £5m new look takes shape



Jason Carpenter, left, Greswolde site manager John Logan, Jan Brennan, Jacqui Carman, Jim Diston, college estate director

A £5 MILLION extension at a Dudley college is shooting upwards rapidly, with the steel structure now in place.

Contractors have been working to create a new teaching block at Halesowen College. Animal care, science and IT students will be based within the multi-million-pound block.

Students on animal care courses will also be able to use an outside courtyard which will be created as part of the plans.

A rooftop science garden forms part of the development by Greswolde Construction off Whittingham Road, Halesowen.

It is part of a £20 million redevelopment scheme planned for the college to update the Whittingham Road campus.

## Standards

Halesowen College principal Keith Bate said: "Our new building is starting to take shape and it is very exciting."

"New and existing students will benefit from this brand new block which will further enhance our teaching facilities and provide excellent equipment incorporating the latest technology for our students."

"These are very popular subjects and we also have a new veterinary nursing course starting in September. We pride ourselves on our high standards and our modern teaching environment."

Mr Bate added: "The new block is being funded by the college which shows the strength of investment in our future and our students' future."

Phase one of the new-look college was completed in September 2009.

## Cash joy to secure future of Old Hall

THOUSANDS of pounds in council funding is to be set aside to maintain at Haden Hill's historic Old Hall.

Sandwell Council has diverted £17,500 to cover renovations at the building, which dates back to the Tudor era.

The money will come from the authority's property maintenance account.

## Protect

Councillor Ann Shackleton, Sandwell's culture and leisure boss, said: "I have met with the Friends of the Hall and they were over the moon."

Old Hall is not listed, but she promised to look at options to maintain its facade and history. The Victorian stable block at Old Hall, in Halesowen Road, Cradley Heath, could be put up for sale in a bid to protect the building.

The block, which has lain empty for decades, includes four stables, tack rooms, coach house, workshop and grooms' accommodation.

## One in five town centre shops now lie abandoned

ONE in five shops in the West Midlands are now vacant, and retail experts warn that some high streets will never return to their pre-recession days.

Town centre vacancy rates nationally rose from 12 per cent at the end of 2009 to 14.5 per cent at the end of 2010, according

to the Local Data Company. In the West Midlands the overall figure is 19 per cent, with up to 25 per cent in worst-hit areas.

Figures from October-January show 17 per cent of units vacant in Brierley Hill, 20 per cent in Dudley, eight per cent in Stourbridge and four per cent in Halesowen.

Dudley Council deputy leader Les Jones said: "Obviously the recession has affected all sorts of retail businesses everywhere."

LDC director Matthew Hopkinson said: "A legitimate question should be whether it will ever fall back to the low levels seen in the thriving pre-recession times."

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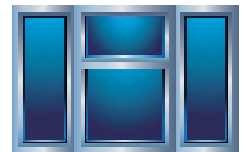


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## thechronicle

### Hats off to restoration of church

IT WAS cheers all round as workers started the painstaking process of restoring a landmark Dudley church.

The first stage of a project to transform and reopen St John's Church, in Kates Hill, Dudley, started last week. Costs for the works could stretch to £1million.

A preservation society, formed to try and reopen the church which shut in 2002 due to safety fears, has helped raise about £31,000 towards the first phase of work.

Contractors Elcock and Wood began the first phase by installing a lightning conductor to the roof and clearing debris from the drains around the Grade II listed building. The church in St John's Road roof will then be waterproofed.

Plans are also being drawn up to restore the lychgate entrance to the church, where Black Country boxing legend William Perry – the Tipton Slasher – is buried.

Society chairman Deb Brownlee said: "We really needed to get to this point because people had been so generous."



Workers and residents celebrate repairs starting on St John's Church, Dudley

## Speak English, MP urges immigrants

FOREIGNERS who settle in Britain should be prepared to "speak English, pay their way and play by the rules", says a Dudley MP.

Labour MP Ian Austin backed comments made by Prime Minister David Cameron about multiculturalism.

Now Mr Austin has called for a debate on citizenship and

"what it means to be British". He believes Britain needs to promote its national identity.

Mr Cameron said there was a need for a stronger national identity to stop people turning to extremism – and an end to "state multiculturalism" encouraging different communities to live separate lives.

In Parliament Mr Austin called for a Commons debate on what he described as an "important speech" by Mr Cameron. The Dudley North

MP said it was crucial that the country should "discuss how we can build a much stronger sense of what it means to be British".

This, he said, is "based on the contribution that people are prepared to make – whether they want to work hard, play by the rules, pay their way, whether they are prepared to speak English, because that is the only way to play a full role in British society, and their commitment to the great British values of democracy, equality, freedom, fairness and tolerance".

Labour's shadow justice secretary Sadiq Khan accused Mr Cameron of "writing propaganda for the EDL".

### Bag thief knocks woman to ground

A WOMAN was knocked over by a thug who snatched her bag as she walked through Dudley town centre. The 40-year old was walking along Nelson Road when a man grabbed her handbag from her shoulder, causing her to fall. The bag contained about £80. Witnesses should call police on 0345 113 5000.

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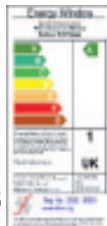


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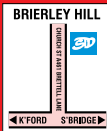
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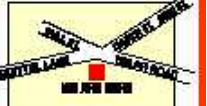
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# School learning curve ready to be approved

## £64,000 a bonanza for cyclists

YOUNG cyclists in Dudley are set to benefit from a £64,000 grant from the Department of Transport.

The cash has been handed to Dudley Council to run Bike-ability, which teaches children the skills and confidence needed to ride safely on today's roads.

The road safety team can now offer 1,600 extra places on the course, aimed at school pupils aged nine to 12.

The course can cater for everyone from a beginner through to an experienced cyclist hoping to gain advanced skills.

Last year more than 2,000 people were trained by a team of instructors.

Schools or individuals that would like to find out more can call 01384 815432.



Councillor Angus Adams and instructor Chris Grego with Jennifer Condyffe-Fisher and Lauren Paul, both 10

RENEWED plans for a three-storey teaching block and dining hall at a Dudley school have been backed by council planners.

Hillcrest School and Community College, in Netherton, wants to proceed with the development on land next to the playing fields.

The proposals have been recommended for approval by Dudley Council's development control committee.

The plans are a modified version of a previous application which was given the nod in 2008. The school is now looking to increase its yearly intake from 180 pupils to 210.

### Sunscreen

The new block will be built with a curved floor plan and will also include offices and staff rooms alongside the classrooms.

The plans will also see a two-storey dining room built on part of the existing car park. This too will be built in a contemporary style in a square shape but with an elongated point at one end.

Both buildings at the Simms Lane school will also contain a freestanding sun screen, which will be built following the curve of the teaching block.

The existing dining room dates from 1958 when the school was built and only caters for 150 pupils.

It means the main hall also has to be used at lunch times as up to 400 pupils could be on one sitting.

### Rule-change on use of festive decoration

CHARITIES wishing to use Sandwell Council's Christmas decorations will have to apply in writing and provide receipts.

Applicants will in future have to say what the money they raise will go towards, which council property they wish to use, and nominate the period of fundraising.

Charities will have to confirm that they are willing to be associated with community groups.

Councillor Mary Docker, secretary of Blackheath Business and Community Association, said it would not be applying to use the council's Christmas trees.

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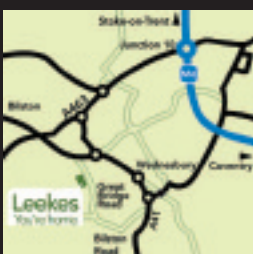
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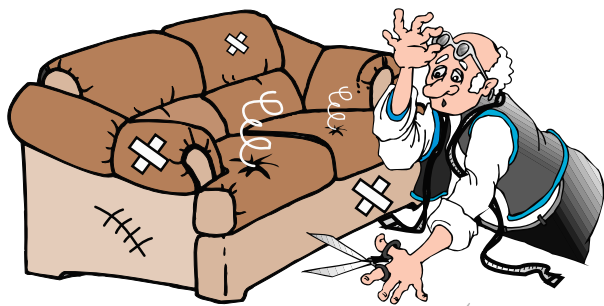
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# Pinning down the latest in craft tips

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The show, which features Sewing for Pleasure, Hobbycrafts and Fashion and Embroidery & Stitch is at Birmingham's NEC from March 24-27. And you could go free as the Chronicals have teamed up with the organisers to offer 80 readers the chance to win a pair of tickets.

The Stitchcraft show - Sewing for Pleasure - has more than 150 exhibitors and workshops including Heirloom Machine Stitching and Jane Greenoff's Itch to Stitch Workshop.

There's a chance to see the new knitting project Above and Below the Waves and head to the Pattern Bar to view all the latest pattern books.

With textile art displays and a catwalk show, Fashion Embroidery & Stitch is a must-visit for all textile fans.

Check out displays from The National Needlework Archive and the Quilters Guild. Don't miss Afghanistan Inspiration, which showcases some of the stunning embroidery squares created by the women of Laghmani Village, Afghanistan.

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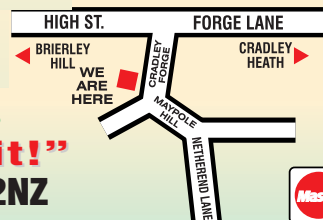


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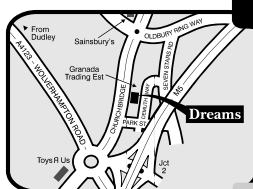
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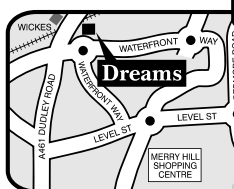
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## Very special celebrations for two local residents



Jack and his late wife Winn back in 1935



Jack Jones with his 'sweetheart', 59-year-old Adele Cleeton

# Pals keeping me young at 103, declares Jack

DATES with much younger "girlfriends" and weekly outings to the pub with the "lads" are helping to keep Jack Jones young at heart – at the age of 103.

The Stourbridge centenarian has three regular dates but says the top of his list and his "sweetheart" is 59-year-old Adele Cleeton, of Kingswinford, who takes him out to the theatre and restaurants and visits him at least once a week.

He met Adele about eight years ago when she was visiting her parents, who used to live near Jack.

"She's my sweetheart and very special to me – it's a bit too late for me to propose but I would if I was a few years younger," said Jack.

"We're going to see Joseph at the Grand Theatre in Wolverhampton soon."

Adele said: "Jack is the nicest young man that I know and we have a lovely, platonic relationship."

Jack, who lives off Enville Street, Stourbridge, also goes on outings with a 36-year-old from Brierley Hill, who recently took him to the cinema in Merry Hill, and a 72-year-old from Hagley who visits him twice a week and takes him on drives.

### Pint

"The young friends I've got give me an incentive to keep going," he said.

Jack popped into his favourite pub, The Greyhound in Norton Road, for his weekly free pint of ale on Wednesday, along with his "chauffeur", 90-year-old Harold Haywood, and "young" friend Howard Cartwright, 85.

Staff and customers at The Greyhound put out



Jack Jones in the 1940s

banners and a cake to mark his latest birthday which he reached on Saturday, February 12.

The pub awarded him a free pint of bitter once a week for life two years ago – and the West Bromwich Albion fan still claims it every Wednesday.

Jack and Harold, of Farmcroft Road, Wollerscot, Stourbridge, worked together as long distance lorry drivers for 46 years, first at Taylor Law in Stourbridge and later at the Bluebird toffee factory in Hun-

nington, near Hale-

sowen.

Jack was born in Enville, near Stour-

bridge, and later moved with his family to Church-

ill and then

travelling all over the

country working. He did not stop driving until he was aged 96.

When he was 17 and had passed his driving test he says he wed in 1939 and had been married almost 50 years when she died.

## Sugary tea's the sweet secret of Florence, 103

DOUBLE celebrations were held last week when Florence Reeve became a great grandmother for the third time – on her 103rd birthday.

Her birthday, on Valentine's Day, was even more special with the birth of great-grandson Yuzuna in Paris that morning.

Mrs Reeve's day started with morning coffee with family at the Queen's Hotel, Belbroughton. In the afternoon a party with entertainment was held at Breach House residential home, in Holy Cross Lane, Belbroughton, where she has lived for the last six years.

The Stourbridge branch of Waitrose provided an extra

surprise with flowers, champagne and a card along with the birthday cake ordered from the store. Her two daughters Carole, aged 72, and Susan, 63, together with 65-year-old son John, were delighted by the gesture.

Daughter Carole Swinger, said: "Everyone shared the delicious cake which had a token four candles for Florence to blow out – there wasn't really room for 103."

Mrs Reeve also has three grandchildren and two step-grandchildren. She was born in Coventry on February 14, 1908 – the same year the first car was put into production by American Henry T Ford.

Mrs Reeve worked as a

weaver and embroiderer for firms in the Midlands.

She married Phillip in 1934. The couple moved to Wor-

cestershire in 1970, where they both enjoyed walking and modern sequence dancing.

After her husband died in 1994, Florence moved to Wolverley, near Kidderminster, before transferring to Breach House.

Mrs Reeve puts her age down to sipping countless brews with three spoons of sugar. Mrs Swinger said: "The family joke that she is preserved in syrup like a tinned peach!"

"She's not had an easy life, for example she lived through the blitz in Coventry. But this has led to great spirit and determination."



Florence Reeve marks the big day



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## thechronicle

## Scrapyard swag just adult DVD

WOULD-BE metal thieves who raided a scrapyard made off with only an adult DVD, a court heard.

Michael Wesson, aged 23, of Jason Road, Stourbridge, and Paul Sedgewick, aged 18, of Grace Road in Tipton, were told they face jail terms after admitting trespass and theft at Metal Micky's, in Bradleys Lane, Tipton, on February 6. The pair moved metal cylinders around with forklift trucks before they were chased from

the yard by a police officer and his dog. Warley magistrates were told last week. Sedgewick produced the DVD from a pocket and said he had taken it from the scrapyard.

Maxine Jarrouse, prosecuting, said the pair were spotted on CCTV at 11.30pm on February 6 and police were called. Magistrate Paul Woodin, adjourning for reports before sentencing on March 8, said: "Our preliminary indication is custody for the both of you at this stage."

# Overdose man found dead by friend at flat

## Brothers setting pace for tribute

BROTHERS Dave and Stuart Antcliff will be paying tribute to their late father while raising money for charity by competing in a Dudley running challenge.

The pair will don their trainers to take part in the five-mile Action Heart run on Sunday, February 27 which starts and finishes at Dudley's Russells Hall Hospital.

They are raising money in memory of their father John who died of a heart attack in January, aged 69.

To help them in their fundraising quest they have also enlisted their aunt, John's sister, Pamela Cashmore, aged 70, who will also be running.

Dave, aged 38, of Gornal, works as a fire-fighter at Dudley Fire Station.

Donations to the cause can be left at [www.just-giving.com/the-nose-bros](http://www.just-giving.com/the-nose-bros) or by cheque to Dave Antcliff, c/o Dudley Fire Station, Burton Road, Dudley, DY1 3BZ.



Firefighter Dave Antcliff and brother Stuart, who are to do a charity run in memory of their father John

A DUDLEY man died of a drug overdose and after drinking a large amount of alcohol, an inquest heard.

Christopher Byrne, aged 30, of Stourbridge Road, collapsed at the home of a friend last March and was later found to have stopped breathing. Paramedics were called to Claverley Court, Vicarage Prospect, Dudley, but could not save him.

Black Country Coroner Robin Balmain recorded a verdict of accidental death at last week's inquest held at Dudley Coroners Court.

## Cocaine

Mr Byrne had met up with three friends and had gone to the Claverley Court flat where crack cocaine and heroin were smoked.

He later collapsed and his friend believed he just needed to sleep off the effect of drugs and alcohol. Later they found his lips had turned blue and he had stopped breathing.

## Thieves caught loading metal girders onto lorry

TWO THIEVES were caught red-handed stealing £300 of metal girders from a disused industrial site in Tipton.

Mark Guest and Frank Highton claimed to be working when police spotted them loading the items onto a lorry. Checks revealed they were not meant to be there.

At Wolverhampton Crown Court, Highton, 57, of Jubilee Road, both Tipton, both admitted burglary. Each was given a 12-month community order and told to pay £220 costs. The offence took place in September last year.

## TECHNOLOGY

## thechronicle

# Sound choices

THE Lenco Speakerball for iPod is a stylish way to hear your musical collection whilst also keeping your iPod charged and ready to go.

This iPod docking station doesn't take up a lot of space but delivers powerful sound from its two built-in high fidelity speakers and sub-woofer for potent bass. It has adjustable bass and treble plus four equalisers.

It supports all iPods and has aux in and mini-USB connection, comes with remote control, power adapter, mini-USB to USB cable and two aux cables. It is available in four colours - black, white, grey and orange.

Speakerball can be bought from [www.lenco.co.uk](http://www.lenco.co.uk) for £99.99.

LENCO'S HP-080 Noise Cancelling Headphones are a good value choice for music fans who do not want to be disturbed by extraneous noise - or are thoughtful enough not to want leaking sound to annoy those nearby.

The comfortable snug-fit stereo phones fit over the ear and don't need power for casual use. However, find yourself in a noisy environment and throw the switch for the battery powered (two AAA batteries) noise cancelling function to kick in. This makes them useful for

commuters or those who share a busy lounge with TV viewers and console game players.

## Airplane

For the technically minded, that means noise reduction at 16db at 300Hz. The cord length at 112cms is

just about adequate but an extension would be required for TV viewing or console gaming.

It comes with an airplane adapter that's useful for long haul trips.

The noise cancelling headphones are available from [www.lenco.co.uk](http://www.lenco.co.uk) for £34.99.



The Flex headset earphones from Radiopaq

FLEX headsets from Radiopaq are an excellent solution for the active music lover who finds that traditional earphones tend to fly off or get in the way during a workout, run or some other vigorous sporting activity.

Flexible lightweight ear hooks enable the user to secure their phones and keep loose wires out of the way whilst delivering a decent sound quality and ear fit via three sizes of silicone earphone cushions.

The flex incorporates a touch-button remote control on the cable to control volume, play, pause and track selection. For users, automatic call cut-in allows calls to be answered hands-free using the built in mic on the cable remote.

Those who want music on the move can get the innovative Flex for around £24.99, from HMV, Game and online at Amazon.

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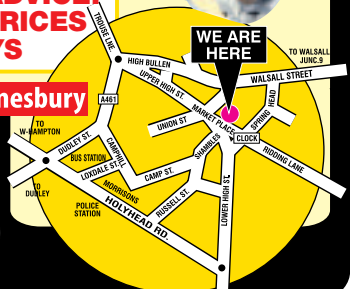
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## The pies have it and it's all for charity



Copthorne Hotel head chef Steve Sutton and Dudley Group of Hospitals fundraiser Karen Phillips getting ready for the charity pie-eating contest

A HOSPITAL charity is appealing for Desperate Dans with huge appetites to get stuck into its latest fundraising challenge.

The Dudley Group of Hospitals Charity is holding a pie-eating contest on March 24 at the Copthorne Hotel in Brierley Hill.

Contestants will have to munch their way through a meat pie, and the first to finish will win a leisure club membership at the hotel. Registration is £25 which includes a pie meal for the contestant and three supporters. The evening will be rounded off with a prize quiz.

Hotel general manager Matt Ward said: "We will be working with the Dudley Group of Hospitals Charity throughout the year on various exciting projects."

"The pie-eating contest is a hilarious event to get the ball rolling, and we hope for a great turnout."

Charity fundraising co-ordinator Karen Phillips said she hoped the contest would be held regularly. Call her on 01384 456111 to take part.

# Russells Hall tops list for cancelling surgery

DUDLEY'S Russell Hall Hospital heads the West Midlands list for cancelling operations at the last minute, according to new figures. Staff cancelled 319 appointments between October and December 2010, compared with 121 in neighbouring Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital, which includes Rowley Regis Hospital.

Non-clinical causes of cancellations across the Midlands were cited as staff shortages, increased emergency activity and a lack of beds.

During the same three-month period, 91 procedures were called off by Mid-Staffordshire Hospital trust, 84 by The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals, 25 by Walsall Hospitals and 152 by Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. Paula Clark, chief executive of Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which runs Russells Hall Hospital, said: "We make every effort to carry out operations on the day they are planned. However, there are some occasions when this is not possible." Reasons include an emergency during a surgery session, running out of time to carry out the operation, or a consultant or anaesthetist being unavailable.

"We did experience a higher number of cancelled operations during December, in particular due to capacity and demand on the hospital," Ms Clark added.

The chief operating officer of Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, Richard Kirby, said: "We work hard to keep cancellations to a minimum."

### Apologise

"When procedures for patients who are fit for surgery are cancelled it is usually due to other operations turning out to be more complex and taking more theatre time than expected, or higher than expected levels of emergency activity leading to shortages of beds or theatre time."

Medical director of Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, Manjit Ohrai, said: "We regret that some operations do have to be cancelled and apologise for any inconvenience caused."

## Polished speaker on mansions

AMBLECOTE History Society is to put mansions in the Black Country under the spotlight at its next meeting. The event will be held at the Church Hall, in Vicarage Road, Amblecote, from 7.30pm on Wednesday, March 9. Historian Ian Bott will lead the talk.

## Drain covers bill soars to £18,000

DUDLEY taxpayers paid more than £18,000 replacing stolen drain covers during the past 12 months. Since last February, 42 covers have been taken by thieves looking to sell them as scrap.

Dudley Council says it is installing covers with hinged grates that cannot be lifted out. It is also looking at using Smart Water technology to mark them invisibly and make them easier to trace.

Council spokesman Chris Howes said theft of drain covers posed a risk to road users and pedestrians as well as being an unnecessary burden on council taxpayers.

If anyone sees suspicious behaviour they should report it to police or to Dudley Council Plus on 0300 555 2345, he added.

### Overhead

Metal thieves continue to strip church roofs of lead, steal garden taps and beer kegs. Copper piping, catalytic converters and tools have also been targeted.

They stole overhead tramway wiring at the Black Country Living Museum. Vehicles are out of action as repair work is expected to take months.

## Zoo art offers food for thought



Education presenter Kellie Piper admires the art in the revamped restaurant at Dudley Zoological Gardens

DINERS at Dudley Zoo will be able to eat in style thanks to a £80,000 revamp of the restaurant.

The restaurant in the historic Queen Mary Ballroom now has new flooring and furniture and has been decorated throughout. The central dance floor has also been sanded back and refurbished.

To brighten up the walls, staff have used 13 blown-up photographs from the zoo's 2011 calendar.

They show a range of zoo animals and their favourite British foods.

Zoo chief executive Peter Sudcock said: "The zoo has bought the very best of British food for our animals since the zoo opened in 1937."

"The calendar was inspired by our involvement with British Food Fortnight which highlights the wide range of excellent foodstuffs on our doorstep. The images are superb."

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Colin Firth as King George VI at Wembley with one of Wyn Jenkins' microphones



Guy Pearce as King Edward VIII in the film, broadcasting with the replica torpedo microphone



Edward VIII makes his abdication speech broadcast which rocked the nation



Wyn Jenkins in his workshop. Beside him is a gun from Primeval

# Model maker Wyn's work is fit for a king

**M**ICROPHONES loom large in The King's Speech, the film about the monarch with a stammer who was terrified of speaking in public.

All the more important, then, that every minute detail is taken into account when the movie props are created.

Enter model maker Wyn Jenkins, whose work has been used for dozens of films and TV dramas.

He painstakingly created a replica of all the 1930s microphones seen in the film, using pictures and film from events that rocked the British Royal Family.

Among them were the distinctive "torpedo" mic through which King Edward VIII announced his abdication, the desktop microphone and speaker set used by King George VI to address the nation from Buckingham Palace on his accession to the throne and the hanging mics

**Prop maker Wyn Jenkins had a key role in the making of Oscar-nominated film The King's Speech. He spoke to JOHN SCOTT**

employed by the King at Wembley and other key moments during the battle to beat his stammer. The startling success of The King's Speech brings great pride to Mr Jenkins, part of the design team whose work helped win their boss Judy Farr a place on the Oscars shortlist for one of the 12 coveted gold statuettes.

Leading actor Colin Firth is also considered a shoo-in for the best actor prize for his performance as King George VI.

Mr Jenkins, a 52-year-old father who operates from a workshop at his home in Harborne, Birmingham, copied a dozen microphones, attempting to keep in every detail right down to the braided wiring.

They feature in detail both in the

film and in publicity shots.

Mr Jenkins has been a model maker for 20 years and already has the perfect prop to mark the awards night – a fake 5ft gold Oscar from the days when corporate theme nights were all the rage.

He explained: "I had worked on and off with Judy for years. We were both former students of Birmingham Polytechnic. She phoned to say they wanted me to make some specific microphones from the 1930s because none still existed and they could not hire them."

## Quality

"It took about a month while the film was in pre-production in November 2009. It was interesting work because it was a quality job. Often the props I make are used on the set for one day and then discarded but these were central to the story line and so had to be made to high specifications."

"The original microphones were knocked up by the back room boys

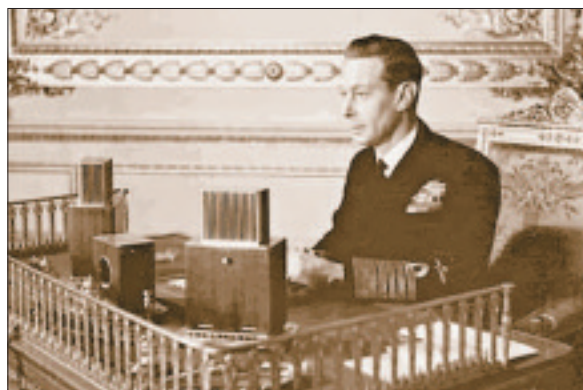
at the BBC. It was new technology for that era which was never mass produced and so I had to copy them from black and white photographs."

"I have been employed on numerous films and TV series but this is the first to be nominated for one Oscar, let alone a dozen! It is particularly satisfying when it was a film where my props had an important part to play on screen."

"I saw the film on Sunday and thoroughly enjoyed it but I have to admit to being astonished by its success... I think many of those involved were. We thought of it as a quirky English film which shows how wrong you can be in this game."

The film has topped the UK charts for three weeks, with audiences across the country applauding when the credits roll.

The attention to detail has been widely praised. One example is the rooms used by speech therapist Lionel Logue, which were lovingly recreated in consultation with his family.



George VI makes his wartime speech, a scene recreated in the film

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# Vital work with a dash of the James Bonds

UNDERCOVER officers, false identities, covert operations and cross-continental counterfeiting rings.

It sounds like the tagline from a James Bond novel – but it's all just par for the course for one Black Country trading standards team.

Based in offices in St James Road, Dudley, the 16 members of operation staff deal with everything from under-age sales of alcohol and cowboy builders to dodgy Gucci watches.

And it's big business. Some £5.7million of fakes including copied DVDs, computer games and bogus designer clothes has been seized across the Black Country in just 10 months, new figures reveal.

Rip-off designer belts, England football shirts and Ugg boots were confiscated by Trading Standards.

Illegal copies of the latest Hollywood blockbusters and hit console games make up the bulk of the haul.

The figures, for the financial year to date, show a huge rise on 2009/10, when around £1.3m of fake merchandise was confiscated.

Since April, Dudley Council's Trading Standards has seized goods worth £1.4m, up from £155,000 in 2009/10.

## Purchases

Manager Mike Chambers said: "Our job has become a lot more intense over the years – we're not just watching some bloke on a market stall any more."

"Much of our work starts online, where we often make covert test purchases to see whether goods really are counterfeit."

This, he revealed, includes the creation of a completely fabricated identity – who cannot be named for obvious reasons – who has his or her own eBay account and own credit card, set up with the co-operation of the credit card company.

Mr Chambers, who has worked in Trading Standards for more than 20 years and has been running Dudley Council's

**As more than £5million worth of counterfeit goods are seized across the Black Country, CHARLOTTE CROSS takes a peek behind the scenes at a Trading Standards operation**

department for around two and a half, said much of the increase is down to the recession.

"The cash economy thrives during a recession, and when people think there's a buck to be made they come out of the woodwork," he said. "That can be counterfeit goods or rogue traders."

The motorway network and being on the fringes of a big city means Dudley gets a significant amount of counterfeit fraud, he said.

The West Midlands as a whole is considered a "hotspot" because of the inland port in Coventry, he added. "It's all very well done, and highly organised. You get the components being delivered separately, to be put together by someone in this country," he said.

"Even some of the manufac-



Trading standards manager Mike Chambers with some of the goods

turers have told us the products we have seized are extremely good copies."

Counterfeiting often follows popular fashions and trends.

The big craze last Christmas was for Ugg boots, counterfeit versions of which were being sold for £120 per pair, so even the price wouldn't tip off an unsuspecting customer. The World Cup last year also saw a number of fake England shirts appear on the market.

Another raid discovered fake Rolex and Cartier watches, the genuine articles of which would be worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, while in another, police discovered a

haul of "designer" belts in what they had thought was a cannabis factory.

Mr Chambers said: "We have been surprised to see just how much counterfeiters make from their illegal activities."

## Prison

In one case a counterfeiter was making over £100,000 per year. That is why any counterfeiter who are taken to court can expect lengthy prison sentences.

There is now a regional intelligence cell in Stafford which collates every Trading Standards report across 14 Midland authorities to spot patterns and

warn of potential suspects.

This also allows cross-border work, enabling authorities to uncover the full scale of one person's criminal history.

The cell also examines trends in what cowboy builders are up to. Recently, there has been a boom in traders offering jet-washing of roofs. A few months before it was re-laying driveways.

The number of traders offering "green" services – such as "insulating paint" or solar panels – has also been on the rise. "People are so switched-on to saving money and saving the planet by insulating their homes better, it's another



Fake Rolex watches

example of them spotting a niche market," Mr Chambers said. "Because these kind of traders are transient in nature, it can be extremely difficult to track the rogue ones down."

"People part with large amounts of money for things they don't need, are shoddily done or even not done at all."

Currently, the biggest challenge for the team is dealing with crime targeted at elderly and vulnerable people.

A person once duped is added to a "sucker list" of easy targets which is sold on to other criminals.

"There is lots of information available on the internet that we might not be aware of – it's big business," said Mr Chambers.

## Dodgy

And then there is undercover work – not only test purchases of suspected dodgy goods, but also routine exercises checking on which shops are selling alcohol, cigarettes and fireworks to underage teenagers.

"It's very exciting, and it's challenging working in this department," Mr Chambers said.

"Of course, it's not all undercover operations and raids – some of it's day-to-day things like food and product safety."

"But I like to think that, through our officers, we are making a real difference to the people in Dudley."



Labels on counterfeit Ugg boots



Just some of the counterfeit tobacco which was seized



Some bootleg bottles of Glen's Vodka



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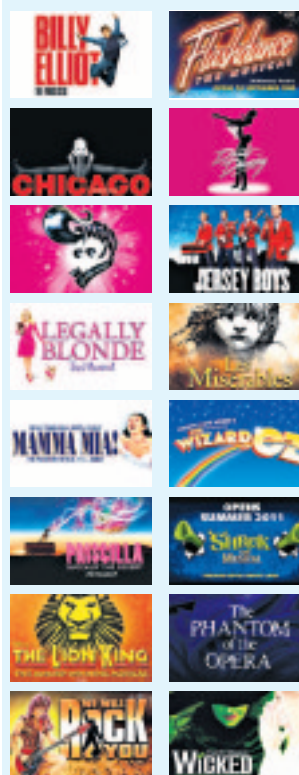
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# the pulse



Ben Drew – better known as Plan B

## There is Plan B for sell-out gig

FRESH from winning the award for best British male solo artist at the Brits, Ben Drew – better known as Plan B – will be playing in front of a sold out capacity audience at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Thursday, March 3. It may be the last time many fans get to see him in a medium-sized venue before the arena tours.

Emerging from London's grime music scene, Plan B became massively popular in 2010 thanks to the million-selling album *The Defamation of Strickland Banks*, which blends rap with potent songwriting.

The single *She Said* was part of the year's essential soundtrack and *Stay Too Long* was a hit on the dancefloors. Meanwhile, he is about to release his latest single from the album, *Writing's On The Wall*.

Singer-songwriter Liam Bailey, who is being championed by Amy Winehouse and is signed to her music label, will be supporting Plan B at the Civic.

## Flawless display on show

**B** RITAIN'S Got Talent finalists Flawless bring their dazzling dance skills to Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Friday, March 4. The 10-man troupe, pictured right, from London present their *Chasing The Dream* spectacular, which showcases their talents ranging from street dance and hip hop to jazz and modern interpretation.

Less acrobatic than the other big dance act *Diversity* they are, ironically, more diverse in the genres they represent and no less impressive with dynamic styles performed with precision to a funky soundtrack.

Tickets are priced £19.50, available on 0870 320 7000 or online at [www.wolvscivic.co.uk](http://www.wolvscivic.co.uk)



Brit winner Cee Lo Green will be appearing at Birmingham

## Brit winner Cee Lo ready for Brum date

SOUL man Cee Lo Green, who won the international male solo artist award at the Brits, performs his rescheduled gig at Birmingham's O2 Academy on March 28.

The American had a massive hit with *Forget You* (and its expletive strewn original version) and his album *The Lady Killer*.

Other gigs to watch out for: reunited Boyzone at the LG Arena at the NEC on Wednesday, featuring a tribute to the late Stephen Gately; Hawaiian singing sensation Bruno Mars has sold out his Birmingham HMV Institute gig on March 15; Adele has added concerts at Wol-

verhampton Civic Hall on September 10 and 11 to follow her HMV Institute gig on April 18; Welsh rockers Manic Street Preachers play Wolverhampton Civic Hall on May 19; Welsh rock hero Gruff Rhys, of The Super Furry Animals, gigs with surf rockers Y Niwl at Birmingham Glee Club this Sunday; double Brit winner Tinie Tempah will fill Birmingham's O2 tonight (Thursday); megastars to announce shows at the LG Arena are Neil Diamond (June 28) and Dolly Parton (September 2). Old punks will be at the Robin, Bilston, on Thursday (tonight) for Anti-Nowhere League.



TV listings start – page 26

**YOUR EIGHT-PAGE ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE AND WEEK'S TV VIEWING**



Theatre and show round-up – page 25



Jim Davidson's new play – page 30

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## the pulse

# Song and dance at their best in shows

SPRING is in the air at Birmingham Hippodrome where the Birmingham Royal Ballet perform Frederick Ashton's brightly coloured rural idyll La Fille mal gardee from Wednesday to Saturday, March 2 to 5.

A beauty upsets the apple cart when she falls in love with a farm lad in this enchanting family favourite ballet. When producer and director Bill Kenwright brings his production of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat to Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, on Tuesday and audiences will undoubtedly recognize the young man in the leading role.

Keith Jack was one of the most popular finalists in the hit BBC series Any Dream Will Do.

Watched by millions every Saturday night, the show was produced to find a leading man for Andrew Lloyd Webber's Joseph revival in the West End production. Young Glaswegian



Keith Jack plays Joseph



La Fille mal gardee - Michael O'Hare as Widow Simone with artists of Birmingham Royal Ballet. Photograph Bill Cooper

Keith charmed audiences week after week with his vocal talents, finally coming in a close second to Lee Mead.

He went on to play the Narrator in the UK tour of Joseph and returns for the 2011 tour in the lead role.

The Scottish singer and actor has appeared as Aladdin at the King's Theatre Glasgow, the title role in Peter Pan in Aberdeen and created the lead role of Charlie in the new musical Only the Brave, which premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

He has released two albums. His debut called This Time went into the Top 40. His most recent album An Evening at the Musicals was released last year.

He will be wearing the coat of many colours at the Grand for six days. Wild At Heart actress Dawn Steele leads an all-star cast in Agatha Christie's Verdict, which had its first performance at the Grand more than 50 years ago, at the Lichfield Street theatre to Saturday night.

Rachel Kavanaugh directs Lucy Caldwell's Notes To Future Self, about the daughters of a 'New Age' globe-trotter who return to Birmingham,

which gets its premiere at the Mac in Cannon Hill Park, Edgbaston, on Thursday, March 3, and runs to March 12 before touring.

Dudley's most famous son, comedian Lenny Henry will be bringing his musical memories from Cradle to Have to Birmingham's New Alexandra Theatre on Monday and will be back in the area for a gig at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on March 10.

Other comedy highlights include musical surrealism from Boothby Graffoe on Tuesday at the Arena Theatre in Wolverhampton; Georgie comedienne Sarah Millican has sold out her Chatterbox dates at Birmingham Town Hall tomorrow (Friday) and at the Wulfrun Hall in Wolverhampton on March 6; and Craig Campbell has sold out his Slade Rooms gig in Wolverhampton tomorrow.

The region's big musical blockbuster is The Sound of Music, with Jason Donovan and Verity Rushworth, which continues at Hanley's Regent Theatre in the Potteries until March 5. Disney On Ice present Disneyland Adventure at the LG Arena of the NEC this week with last performances on Sunday.

## No more burger van but Angelos is on the road

Shooting Star sensation Angelos Epithemiou is coming to the Black Country for the first time, as he tells LEON BURAKOWSKI via a dodgy mobile line

GRECO-LONDON former burger van vendor Angelos Epithemiou, the comedy creation of Dan Renton Skinner, is making one of his rare journeys outside the confines of the M25 to bring his distinctive wit and wisdom to the folk of Wolverhampton and Birmingham.

I caught up with Angelos via his dodgy mobile on a noisy street in the capital and he told me that though he had been to Birmingham before, he had never been to the Black Country - "though I did once visit Trinidad".

His recently found fame via the series of Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer's Shooting Stars spoof panel show, first as a panellist in place of Johnny Vegas and now as the keeper of the scores.

He says it beats dispensing burgers and bacon sandwiches. "OMG! The burger van has been destroyed by mysterious forces," says Angelos. "There is no more burger van, so thanks for bringing that up."

"I got four grand on the insurance and I spent that on a task that I bought off eBay. Everyone's into elephants these days. It's a plastic task."

Mortimer 'discovered' Angelos when presenting him with a mobile caterer of the year award. What did Angelos think about his madcap hosts Reeves and Mortimer: "They're a pair of idiots basi-



Dan Renton Skinner - AKA Angelos Epithemiou

Asked if he will miss the focus of his affections on Shooting Stars, Ulrika Jonsson, while on the road, Angelos says: "Well, yeah, but I've got all sorts of cameras set up to look at her."

Catch up with Angelos Neil Epithemiou at the Wulfrun Hall on Wednesday, March 9, or at the HMV Institute in Birmingham on Friday and Saturday, March 11 and 12.

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# Comedy is not black and white for Jim and Matt

Unlikely partners in laughter tell **LEON BURAKOWSKI** how they developed mutual respect

**C**ONTROVERSIAL comedian Jim Davidson has been accused of being racist, sexist and even anti-disabled but he will be taking the accusations head on in Wolverhampton this spring.

The 58-year-old East End comic has been to Wolverhampton many times, he married (and then divorced) a Wolverhampton girl, fourth wife Tracy Hilton.

But this time instead of a comedy gig at the Civic Hall, he will be treading the boards at the Grand Theatre, starring in a play he wrote himself which looks at the serious side of comedy.

The comic with four ex-wives and several children to support, and who was nearly bankrupted by an eye-watering tax bill, is challenging audiences to examine what makes them laugh in *Stand Up And Be Counted!* at the Grand from April 9, for a week.

Written during Davidson's self-imposed exile in Dubai, he will be performing stand-up comedy and looking for lots of laughs.

However, it will not be as Jim but in character as washed-up old comic Eddie Pearce, a character so loathsome and bigoted that he makes Davidson look like Eddie Izzard.

And he will be facing competition for laughs from a hard-hitting young black comedian, Earl T. Laurence, played by Matt Blaize, who is a star of the London stand-up comedy circuit.

Other characters include a gay icon and a reality TV bimbo thrown together with the two comedians to perform at an Aids victims benefit concert.

Davidson and Blaize may seem as different as Chalky and cheese but the two have developed a mutual respect, though that was not always the case.

"I remember Jim on TV when I was a kid. Whenever he did that exaggerated 'Chalky' character voice I would get hell in the playground the next day," says

Matt. The two met when playing different parts of the same venue, Davidson in the big room upstairs and Blaize in the small comedy club.

"Matt came up to me and gave me a stiff talking to about old school comedians, like young guys do. I said 'oh b\*\*\*\*' what do you know?'" says Jim.

"Then we actually got to know each other. I went to see his act and I did find him funny. It's as if he makes it up at that moment. Matt's stuff was genuine, from the heart, and I believed every word.

## Insurance

"The fact that he had 150 people downstairs while I had 2,000 upstairs, that's going to change one day. He will be ringing me up saying 'do you want a support gig'... this is an insurance policy!"

When he needed a sparring partner for his play, Blaize was the natural choice but he got a baptism of fire, preparing for the play and honing his act in front of Davidson's audience as a

surprise support act. "Matt's been working my lot and, I tell you, some of those front rows... you couldn't make one proper human out of the whole lot of them," says Jim.

East Ender Blaize has 10 years experience compared to the older comic's five decades in show business.

Asked why he put himself in front of a potentially hostile audience, he explains: "It's very easy to preach to the converted. What's controversial about saying things to people who want to hear it - try saying it to people who don't want to hear it. Yeah, but I haven't yet got Jim to perform in Brixton in front of 300 angry Rastafarians."

Blaize appreciates Davidson's craft, his timing and way he can work a crowd and Davidson responds: "Matt is a better comic than me when I started out. I just did joke after joke after joke. "Cartoon black accent, silly Irish accent. Now I've been doing it for 45 years and I am a good performer technically." The comedian, who first found

fame on TV talent show *New Faces* in the early 1970s, revealed that it was money and girls that fired his ambition.

"If I saw a good comic then, my first thought was 'I've got to be funnier than him', he says. "I have been a star not because of my ability to make people laugh but because of my ability to make other people money."

"But after *New Faces* I told my mum she would never have to work again, and she didn't... the lazy cow!"

## Shocking

The play is about the clash of culture, generations and race but both men agree people should think about what makes them laugh. Matt says: "Comedy is going full circle with comedians prepared to say the most shocking things but that's OK because it's 'ironic'." Jim adds: "The difference between me and the character I play is that Eddie doesn't know what is offensive. I do. What we say on stage has consequences."



Matt Blaize and Jim Davidson at The Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton, where they will be appearing in Davidson's play *Stand Up And Be Counted*

**Agatha Christie's Verdict**, **Wolverhampton Grand Theatre**  
VERDICT is a curio for Christie fans. More melodrama than mystery, this play thoughtfully ponders the meaning of love and ethics. There is a murder but we know whodunnit. The 1958-set story concerns a brilliant Hungarian professor exiled in London, his chronically ill wife and the self-sacrificing cousin who tends to her. Enter a dangerously determined young student who has decided that she loves the professor.

## Three Phantoms

**Birmingham Hippodrome**  
THREE artists who have, between them, clocked up 3,000 performances as *The Phantom of the Opera*, and one of the original Christines, joined forces for a one-night concert of songs from the shows that brought West End sparkle to the Hippodrome.

Two of the Phantoms, Sunday's show organiser and MC Earl Carpenter and the current keeper of the white mask at Her Majesty's Theatre, John Owen Jones, are no strangers to Birmingham, having played the leading roles of Javert and Jean Valjean respectively in the 25th anniversary touring production of *Les Miserables* in the city a year ago. The third Phantom, Matthew Cammelle, also had happy memories of Brum having met his wife in a past production at the Hippodrome.

Christine was the operatic soprano Rebecca Gaines, who originated the role of Cosette in *Les Mis* and then played Christine opposite Michael

## The Sound of Music

**Regent Theatre, Stoke**  
HOW do you solve a problem like replacing a TV famous Maria? Get in Verity Rushworth. Problem solved.

The former Emmerdale actress has stepped into the role recently vacated by Connie Fisher and has lit up Andrew Lloyd Webber's touring revival of the blockbuster Rodgers and Hammerstein musical.

The production's star name is Jason Donovan as Captain von Trapp, who got lots of coos and one excited "here he is" from the many ladies in the Stoke audience, but it's Verity's energetic, funny and fine voiced Maria who makes the show. Her scenes with a charming troupe of von Trapp children, led by Claire Fishen-

There is one twist but no puzzles for the little grey cells and the play is a slow burner. The drama gets intense. Christie never wrote another play like this, was she exorcising personal demons? It is well acted by the cast of ten with Ali Bastian particularly good as deadly deb Helen Rolander. Robert Duncan's professor had angst but lacked charisma. Harry Potter fans will spot Matthew Lewis (Neville Longbottom) as a student. Verdict continues to Saturday.

Leon Burakowski

Crawford and Colm Wilkinson's Phantoms. They were joined by the excellent 21-piece Concert Philharmonic under the baton of former Phantom musical director Anthony Gabriele.

The concert was presented with light-hearted humour, contrasting with the passionate intensity of many of the songs. The blockbusters were saved until after the interval. Then it was time for songs from *Les Mis* and both Phantom shows plus an interesting selection from some of the Phantom of the Opera musicals that preceded Andrew Lloyd Webber's definitive final version.

The showstoppers came from Owen Jones, getting massive applause for his gorgeous tender version of *Bring Him Home* from *Les Mis* and a soaring *Til I Hear You Sing* Once More from Phantom sequel *Love Never Dies*. Then all three Phantoms joined forces for a very special version of the Phantom's best known song, *Music Of The Night*. LB

den as Liesl, are delightful. Donovan's starchy Austrian/Australian accented captain is a solid leading man but I was underwhelmed by his big number *Edelweiss*.

There is excellent support, both in the acting and singing departments, from Jacinta Mulcahy as the glamorous Baroness Schraeder, Martin Callaghan as the roughest entrepreneur Max and Marilyn Hill Smith's operatic Mother Abbess. At one point her *Climb Every Mountain* seemed to blow away the abbey walls!

While it can never eclipse the movie version with that classic performance from Julie Andrews, this former London Palladium favourite still has a big production feel. It runs until March 5. LB

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	CITROEN	DISPATCH HDI 90 PANEL VAN	SILVER	12/07/2010	£16,655	£9,999*	£6,656	
	CITROEN	RELAY HDI 120 35 HEAVY LWB PANEL VAN	WHITE	29/07/2010	£24,390	£14,999*	£9,391	
	CITROEN	C1 1.0 VTR 3DR	WHITE	31/01/2011	£9,245	£8,999	£2,246	
	CITROEN	C3 PICASSO 1.6 HDI 90VTR+	BLACK	31/01/2011	£15,725	£11,499	£4,226	
	CITROEN	C3 PICASSO 1.6 HDI 90VTR+	BLACK	31/01/2011	£15,725	£11,499	£4,226	
	CITROEN	C3 PICASSO 1.6 HDI 90VTR+	BLACK	31/01/2011	£15,725	£11,499	£4,226	
	HYUNDAI	i10 1.1 EDITION 5DR	BLUE	15/03/2010	£8,975	£6,499	£2,476	
	HYUNDAI	i10 1.2 CLASSIC	SILVER	01/09/2010	£8,295	£6,299	£1,996	
	HYUNDAI	i10 1.2 CLASSIC	BLACK	29/09/2010	£8,295	£6,299	£1,996	
	HYUNDAI	i20 1.2 COMFORT 3DR	BLUE	24/08/2010	£10,965	£7,999	£2,966	
	HYUNDAI	i20 1.2 EDITION 5DR	BLUE	29/03/2010	£11,850	£9,299	£2,551	
	HYUNDAI	i20 1.4 CRDI STYLE 8SP	BLACK	08/09/2010	£14,025	£11,499	£2,526	
	HYUNDAI	i30 1.4 CLASSIC 5DR	SILVER	25/03/2010	£14,000	£8,799	£5,201	
	HYUNDAI	i30 1.4 EDITION 5DR	SILVER	24/06/2010	£13,425	£10,499	£2,926	
	HYUNDAI	i30 1.6 CRDI PREMIUM	BLUE	03/09/2010	£17,245	£12,999	£4,246	
	HYUNDAI	i30 1.6 CRDI PREMIUM	BLACK	06/09/2010	£17,245	£12,999	£4,246	
	HYUNDAI	i30 (ISGLTHR) 1.6 CRDI PREM ESTATE	BLUE	01/09/2010	£19,845	£13,999	£5,846	
	HYUNDAI	i220 1.4 CRDI STYLE	GREY	22/11/2010	£15,825	£12,999	£2,826	
	HYUNDAI	SANTA FE PREM TST	GREY	08/12/2010	£26,690	£23,999	£2,691	
	HYUNDAI	LOAD COMFORT VAN	GREY	20/10/2011	£14,230	£11,699*	£2,531	
	HYUNDAI	i20 1.4 COMFORT 5DR auto	RED	31/12/2010	£12,160	£10,174	£1,986	

\* Selected vehicles are exclusive of VAT at the current rate

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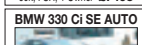
### FORD MONDEO EDGE 130 TDCI



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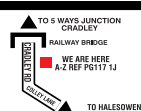


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A.L.A.

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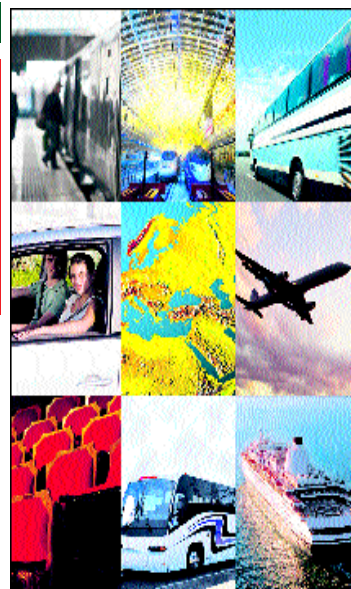
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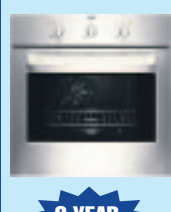


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# sport

## Heathens set to name their final two riders

DUDLEY Heathens are set to complete their team building for the new National League Speedway season tomorrow (February 25).

The former Cradley club will announce their final two signings to supporters at the sold-out Dudley Wood Tote Night at Cradley Heath Liberal Club.

Winter signing Adam Roynon will make the trip from his Cumbrian

home and be officially unveiled to supporters. He will also be available for autographs and pictures with fans and a special print will be available on the night.

Roynon, skipper Jon Armstrong, Tom Perry, Ashley Morris and Darryl Fitchings have been confirmed so far and boss Will Pottinger will announce the last two spots.

He said: "We think it's a nice

gesture to tell the fans at our function on Friday night first. But the club will also send a press release out at the same time, probably around 8.30pm, so anyone who hasn't got a ticket should keep checking the website."

Heathens will also unveil the 2011 racejacket to supporters on Friday. A one-off version has been made which Roynon will sign to be

auctioned off. A 2010 racejacket, signed by the full team, is also available for auction.

Meanwhile HSSC (Heathens Speedway Supporters Club) will also have on sale exclusive T-shirts featuring the 1983 Cradley team – arguably the best in the history of British speedway. Referee Tony Steele will show rare footage from Dudley Wood in the 40s and 80s.

## Boot of Bown to rescue for joyful DK

GARETH BOWN'S last kick of the game penalty gave Dudley Kingswinford victory over Whitchurch at Heathbrook.

DK made a sluggish start, writes Peter Stinton.

Danny Nicholas sent over two early penalties for the visitors who found themselves 6-0 in front after 14 minutes.

After several spurned opportunities DK scored their opening try through Jamie Ramsey, who drove over from a five-metre scrum, with Bown doing the honours from the con-

**Dudley Kingswinford 36  
Whitchurch 33**

version. The lead didn't last long though with Stefan Shillingford's intercepted pass letting in Adam Teare for a shock try, converted for a 13-7 lead.

DK edged back in front thanks to a Stefan Thorp try.

But Whitchurch earned a 20-14 half-time lead when Andy Oaken went over in the corner, with Nicholas adding a superb touchline conversion. DK came

again in the second half with a third try through Jak Davis.

DK's discipline then let them down when lock Ollie Shakespeare was binned for an illegal shoulder charge, leaving them down to 14 men.

The visitors took advantage through the boot of Nicholas, with two more penalties added for a 26-19 lead with 22 minutes to go.

Back at full strength DK responded through Thorp, who blasted over the line from close range, Bown's conversion

leaving the match level.

Then Shillingford's attempt to send Davis away was intercepted by the predatory Teare who raced away for a converted try.

But less than a minute later the league leaders pulled the scores level through Thorp's hat-trick try, converted by Bown. DK went offside, but the home crowd breathed a collective sigh of relief when Nicholas missed the penalty.

And that set the scene for Bown to clinch the win.



Dudley Kingswinford secure lineout ball

## Jones lands hat-trick for happy Hawks

**Halas Hawks 3 Erdington Ladies 0**

HALAS HAWKS LADIES gave one of their best performances of the season to beat Erdington Ladies in the Birmingham County Womens League.

This was a "six pointer" with both teams looking to become runners-up, but Halas took hold of the game from the start.

Kicking up the slope at their Windsor High School pitch, they were 2-0 up at the break thanks to a brace of goals from Jodie Jones.

The second half saw them threaten on numerous occasions before Jones completed her hat-trick.

Erdington failed to convert their best chance, hitting the bar from the penalty spot.

**Girls League**

**Gornal 1 Halas Hawks 3**

Halas Hawks under-13s reached the league cup final with a confident display.

Goals came from Sophie Bloun, Megan Hipkiss and Amy Blakemore, who continued her impressive form after returning from a long-term injury.

**Boys League**

**Halas Hawks West 3 Kingsley 0**

The under-nines West won their first home game of the season thanks to a debut hat-trick from Cameron Russell.

Halas took control from the off, Russell opening his account after Kingsley failed to clear a corner.

His second was a fine strike from just past the halfway line and he grabbed the third by latching onto a rebound after Joshua Wyman's effort was parried.

**Halas Hawks East 3 CS Colts 3**

The under-nines East fell a goal behind and then lost keeper Josh Smith to injury.

Halas equalised through Rickio Fairin-Hall but then conceded again.

Once more Fairin-Hall did the trick but Colts scored again before Charlie Greening had the last word.

**Halas Hawks 3 Rio Saints Juniors 4**

A late Rio Saints goal condemned Halas under-12s West to defeat after they had fought back to level from 3-1 down.

Halas trailed by two but pulled one back through Nathan Foley just before half-time. Rio extended their advantage before two Dylan Keeling goals brought the teams level.

A draw looked likely but a mix-up at the back allowed Rio to bag the crucial goal.

**Withymoor 1 Halas Hawks 3**

Halas under-13s put on a fine show in the first half at Withymoor and may well have been a touch puzzled to find themselves a goal down at the interval.

However, the second half saw a change in fortunes with Dominic Hipkiss grabbing a brace and Liam Holmes rounding off a good win with a third goal. Halas player of the match went to goalkeeper Charlie Bagley who put on a fine performance.

## Carolians fall short by just one point

**Kidderminster C 13  
Bedworth 14**

KIDDERMINSTER anticipated a tough afternoon against a Bedworth side who had hammered them 39-3 before Christmas.

But the Carolians are very hard to beat at home, and eventually succumbed by just a single, frustrating point.

Driving close-quarter forward play in the last 20 minutes enabled Bedworth to protect their advantage. It wasn't pretty, but it worked.

Kidderminster opened strongly but the first time Bedworth got their hands on the ball they made good use of an overlap to move the ball right and score wide out, writes Martin Easton.

KCs shrugged off this setback and 10 minutes later great work by young flanker Mike Protheroe retrieved a lost scrum to set up a backs' move and full-back Ben Stanier timed his run perfectly before sending over left wing Nick Martin in the corner.

Three minutes later fly-half Andy McLellan chipped and won the race for a 10-5 lead.

Three second-half penalties for the visitors, against one for McLellan, gave Bedworth the victory.

HALESOWEN battled bravely for over an hour on Tuesday but their resistance was finally broken as play-off chasing Leamington hit three late goals.

Yeltz keeper Simon Flower did well to tip the ball over the bar in the second minute after Jamie Sheldon's 25-yard free-kick deflected off James Husband.

For Halesowen, Justin Nisbett cut in to fire at home goalkeeper Tony Breeden.

However chances for the visitors remained scarce with the ex-Yeltz central defensive pairing of Liam Daly and Jamie Hood offering little change, writes David Johnson.

Nisbett went close again for the Yeltz after Anthony Bruce threaded through a pass from midfield in but Breeden raced out to clear.

**Defiant**

The Brakes continued to enjoy most of the possession with the ball ping-pong around the penalty area, only to come up against a defiant Halesowen rearguard.

Flower made a fine save from Husband after Michael Tuohy set James Rowe free down the right with Luke Corbett unable to make anything of the rebound.

After half an hour home goalkeeper Breeden was almost caught out when he was beaten to the ball by lively Nisbett.

But the striker was driven wide and his cross was eventually cleared by the defence.

Halesowen continued to be resilient at the start of the second half with

**Leamington 3  
Halesowen T 0**

Flower cutting out Husband's low cross. But their brave resistance was finally broken when Rowe drilled home a low shot.

With Halesowen looking good in possession, Leamington surprisingly doubled their lead when goalkeeper Flower's failed clearance fell straight for Rowe to score his second goal of the evening.

Plucky Yeltz didn't give up and Chris Godwin's header was saved by Breeden under the angle of the crossbar and post from Michael McGrath's 73rd minute free-kick.

Luke Adams made a superb goal-line clearance to keep out substitute Jacob Blyth's fierce drive.

The Brakes made it 3-0 in the final minute when Flower couldn't hold on to Barnfield's shot and Corbett was on hand to tap home the rebound.

The Yeltz were beaten 4-0 at home by Salisbury City at the weekend.

Veteran keeper Tim Clarke, 45, distinguished himself but Jake Reid notched three times – twice from the penalty spot – and Ben Joyce also got on the scoresheet.



Best foot forward: Stourbridge hooker Liam Wordley makes headway against Rosslyn Park

## Derby day cracker looms as Mitchell says: We can win

A DERBY DAY cracker is Stourbridge Saxons chief Neil Mitchell's verdict on this Saturday's clash with near neighbours Cinderford.

With both Stourbridge and their Gloucestershire visitors picking up thrilling wins at the weekend, it should be a battle royal.

"Cinderford's tails will be up after they beat Blackheath and it's a local derby which they will see as their cup-final," Mitchell admitted. "They've hit a vein of form but

we would like to take that scalp.

"They know we have a young side, but I don't see any reason why we shouldn't take another five points."

"If we maintain our good form here at Stourton Park then we have a great chance. But we must stress the importance of defending better and without those sloppy errors I believe we can put back to back home wins together."

Mitchell described events in the first half on Saturday as "starving ourselves defensively", but the

Saxons eventually ran out 27-22 winners at home to Rosslyn Park.

Early mistakes at the break-down saw visiting fly-half Ross Laidlaw showcase his kicking as the Londoners led 12-3.

Mitchell said: "We let ourselves down again in the first half and that's the third home game where we have conceded at least three penalty points."

"It was a pleasing result in the end, but for me it's disappointing because we have made it hard for ourselves again."

## Club race night plea

STOURBRIDGE Cricket Club is looking for just two more local businesses to provide sponsorship for its forthcoming Race Night on Saturday, March 12. The £40 cost includes a race named after the company; a runner in the sponsored race; a prize if the horse wins; mentions of the company name on the night; unlimited tickets to the event; an advertisement on the club sponsors board and a link on the new sponsors page on the club web-site. Anyone who is interested should contact Mark on 07506 747619.

**Gregg charisma**

**Causeway 3**

**Alvechurch 0**

VILLA star Gabriel Agbonlahor's brother Charisma was in the Alvechurch line-up but it was home star Craig Gregg who caught the eye with a hat-trick.

**The Halesowen**

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